Graves' Disease FAQ

WHAT IS THE THYROID GLAND?

The thyroid gland located in the neck produces thyroid hormones which help the body use energy, stay warm and keep the brain, heart, muscles, and other organs working normally.

1 SYMPTOMS

What is Graves' disease?

Graves' disease is hyperthyroidism caused by a generalized overactivity of the thyroid gland. The hyperthyroid symptoms of Graves' disease are the same as those caused by other types of hyperthyroidism (see the *Hyperthyroidism brochure*). Patients may have inflammation of the eyes, swelling of the tissues around the eyes, bulging of the eyes, or double vision. The severity of the eye problems is not related to the severity of the hyperthyroidism. Problems with the eyes occur much more often in people with Graves' disease who smoke cigarettes.

2 CAUSES

What causes Graves' Disease?

Graves' disease is an autoimmune disorder. This means that the patient's own immune system produces antibodies that bind to the surface of thyroid cells and then stimulate those cells to overproduce thyroid hormones.

3 DIAGNOSIS

How is the diagnosis of Graves' disease made?

A physical examination and laboratory tests that measure the amount of thyroid hormone (thyroxine, or T4, and triiodothyronine, or T3) and thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) in your blood are necessary. Your doctor may choose to obtain a picture of your thyroid (a *thyroid scan*).

4 TREATMENT

How is Graves' disease treated?

The treatment of hyperthyroidism may include antithyroid drugs (methimazole [Tapazole®] or propylthiouracil [PTU]), radioiodine, or surgery (see the *Hyperthyroidism Brochure*).

FURTHER READING

Further details on this and other thyroid-related topics are available in the patient information section on the American Thyroid Association® website at *www.thyroid.org*.